

SEA TURTLE SIGHTINGS IN NORTH CAROLINA REPORTED BY PUBLIC AND FERRY BOAT SURVEYS

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The NMFS Beaufort Laboratory has been conducting research, since the summer of 1988, to determine what species of sea turtles are inhabiting what waters in North Carolina. This study uses four methodologies (Epperly and Veishlow 1989; Epperly et al., in press), including a public sighting program and ferry boat survey.

The public sighting program used a poster (Figure 1), which asked the public to report sightings of sea turtles. Attached to the poster was a gummed pad of prepaid, addressed postcards that asked for the date, location, species sighted, and whether the turtle was dead or alive. About 450 posters have been placed along the North Carolina coast at a variety of locations including marinas, commercial fish houses, dive shops, etc. In 1989 a question asking fishermen if they saw a sea turtles during their fishing trip was added to the North Carolina portion of the National Recreational Fishery Statistics Survey, supplementing the data from the public sighting program.

Public sightings have reported 621 live turtles in 1989. The majority of these were in offshore waters (the waters extending seaward from the COLREGS Demarcation line) during the spring and summer months. A few sightings were reported in January, February, and March, but it was not until April, when water activities increased, that sightings were consistently reported. Most species identifications were unconfirmed, thus emphasis in this method is on the number and location of turtles sighted rather than the species. The majority of the returned cards came from residents of coastal North Carolina followed by non-coastal North Carolina residents, and out-of-state residents.

The ferry boat survey placed sighting logs on each North Carolina public ferry. Vessel personnel recorded the number of passages made daily and the location of any turtle sighted, alive or dead. The ferries cross the mouth of the Cape Fear River, Pamlico Sound, the lower Neuse and Pamlico Rivers, Hatteras Inlet and Currituck Sound (Figure 2). Few live turtles were sighted: 20 over an 18-month period (August 1988 - December 1989). The majority of sightings were in Pamlico Sound, specifically from the Hatteras Inlet ferry, during the summer and fall months of 1988. Since the number of turtles reported was too low to warrant the continuation of keeping full-time logs on the ferry boats, the ferry personnel now fill out a sighting card each time a turtle is seen similar to the public sighting program.

LITERATURE CITED

- Epperly, S. P. and A. Veishlow. 1989. Description of sea turtle distribution research in North Carolina, p. 53-55. *In* S. A. Eckert, K. L. Eckert, and T. H. Richardson, compilers. Proceedings of the Ninth Annual Workshop on Sea Turtle Conservation and Biology, 7-11 February 1989, Jekyll Island, Georgia. U.S. Department of Commerce, NOAA Technical Memorandum, NMFS SEFC-232, 305 p.
- Epperly, S. P., J. Braun, and A. Veishlow. In press. Distribution and species composition of sea turtles in North Carolina. *In* T. H. Richardson, J. I. Richardson, and M. Donnelly, compilers. Proceedings of the Tenth Annual Workshop on Sea Turtle Biology and Conservation, 20-24 February 1990, Hilton Head, South Carolina.

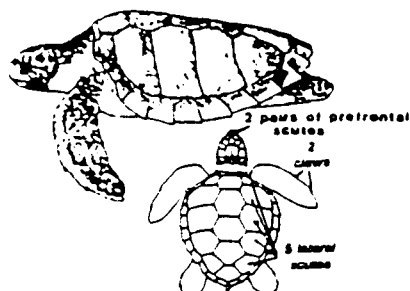
WANTED

SIGHTINGS OF SEA TURTLES

All Atlantic species of sea turtles are listed under the Endangered Species Act of 1973. Sea turtle stocks continue to dwindle. The National Marine Fisheries Service is conducting a study to determine what turtle species inhabit the coastal North Carolina waters and where they are commonly found. **YOU** can help. Take a card below. If you sight a turtle, dead or alive, fill it out as best as you can and drop it in the mail.

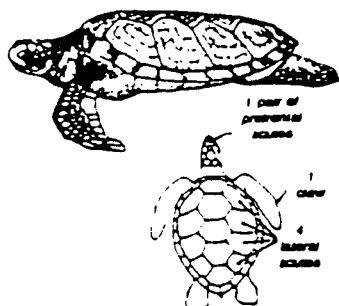
Loggerhead Sea Turtle

Caretta caretta caretta



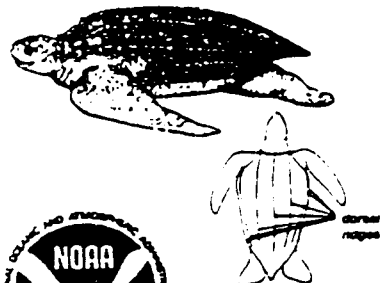
Green Sea Turtle

Chelonia mydas mydas



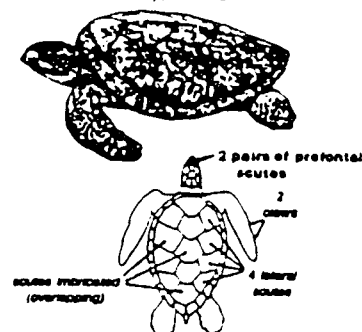
Leatherback

Dermochelys coriacea coriacea



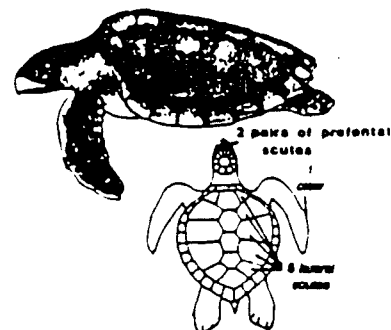
Hawksbill

Eretmochelys imbricata



Atlantic or Kemp's Ridley

Lepidochelys kempi



WARNING: Sea turtles are protected by the Endangered Species Act of 1973, and unauthorized removal or handling of sea turtles is punishable under this law. The incidental taking of endangered sea turtles (Kemp's ridley, hawksbill, leatherback, and Florida breeding green turtles) is prohibited. The incidental taking of threatened sea turtles (loggerhead and green, other than the Florida breeding population of green sea turtles) during normal fishing activities not directed towards capturing turtles is allowed provided that: 1) any turtle so taken must be handled with due care to prevent injury to live specimens, and must be returned to the water immediately whether it is dead or alive unless it is a sea turtle which is alive and unconscious, in which case before returning it to the water, resuscitation must be attempted, and 2) any turtle so taken must not be consumed, sold, landed, offloaded, transhipped, or kept below deck.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT:

Sea Turtle Coordinator
NOAA, National Marine Fisheries Service
Southeast Fisheries Center
Beaufort, NC 28516-9722
(919) 728-3595



FIGURE 1. SEA TURTLE SIGHTING POSTER

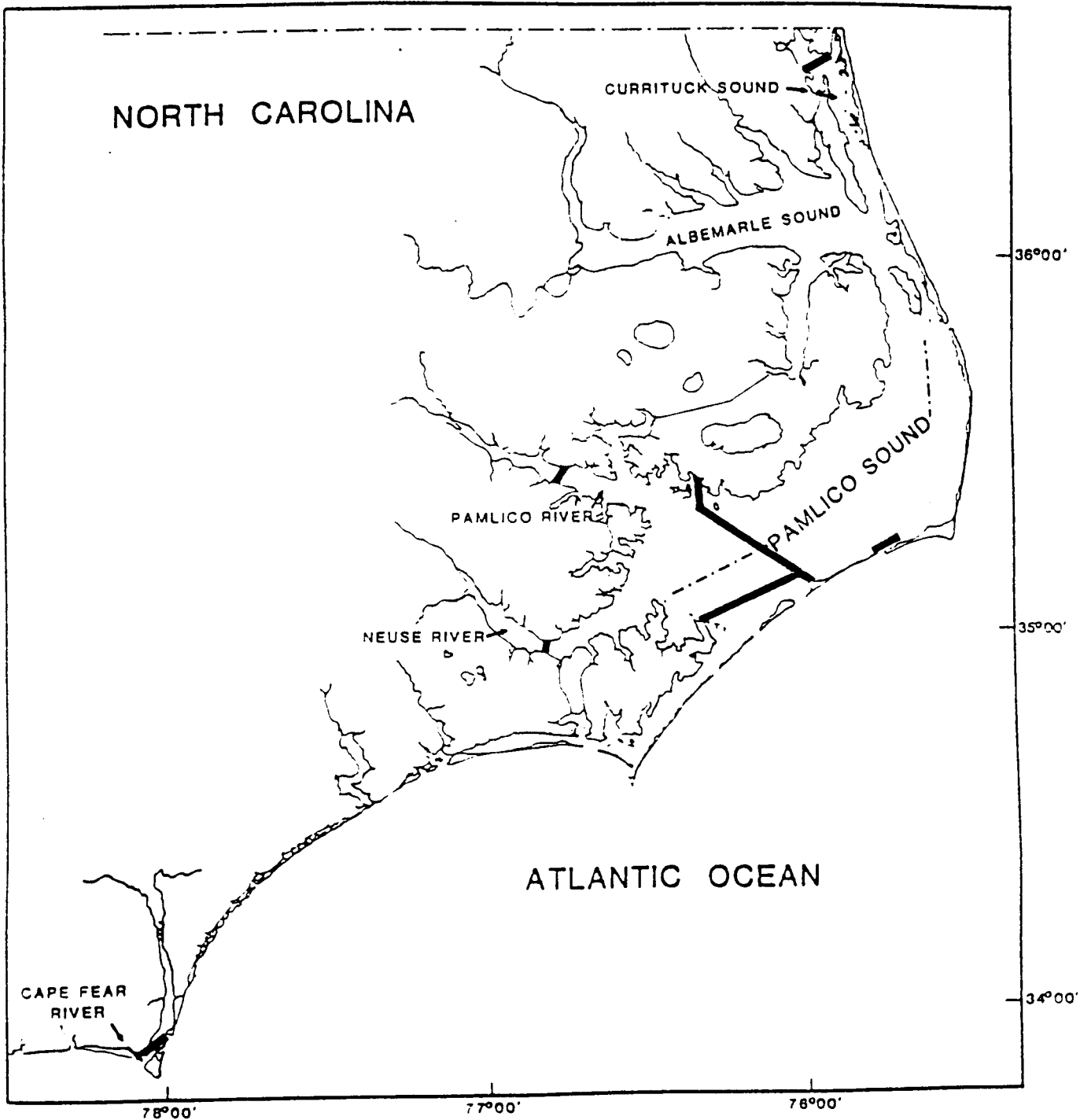


FIGURE 2. N.C. FERRY ROUTE SYSTEM